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The Doomsday Machines: Confessions of an American Nuclear War Planner

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Preface

At the same time I copied the 47 volumes, 7000 Top Secret pages of the Pentagon Papers from my office at the RAND Corporation in 1969-70, I also copied an even larger number of other classified documents and pages. These included the entire contents of my top secret safe. I intended to release these to Congress and the public after the publication of the Vietnam Study, probably after my first trial.

These other documents included some Vietnam studies I had done for the Nixon Administration, but mainly they consisted of my classified notes from years of Top Secret work on nuclear war planning, command and control of nuclear weapons, and participation in and studies of nuclear crises. They included verbatim extracts or copies of crucial documents, plans, studies and cables, and classified studies by others.

One of the latter was a Top Secret Kissinger study for Nixon (NSSM-3) that examined current and proposed nuclear attack options. The *smallest* attack option available to President Nixon in 1969 was calculated to kill 90 million people.

These nuclear-related data over the previous decade were what, above all, I felt called on to disclose to the American public and Congress, much more than the Vietnam Study itself. I gave priority to releasing the latter only because bombs were falling at that time on Vietnam.

I felt it was especially important for me to disclose our long-term recklessness with respect to nuclear threats and war. I was prepared and fully expected to go to prison for life, if not for the initial release of the Pentagon Papers, then for the subsequent disclosures on nuclear policy that I saw as more important (and which were much more closely guarded from public knowledge).

This did not come about, and has remained secret, because most of the nuclear documents were lost. They were buried in a field for safekeeping by my brother and subsequently displaced by a hurricane (!) It was not until my trial for the Pentagon Papers was ended that I finally accepted that our efforts to locate them were futile and that they were irrecoverable.

Forty years later, though some of these documents have been declassified in part, most of the contents of what I meant to reveal then has remained in government safes, as secret

from the public and Congress as my buried copies. I now propose to disclose in as much detail as possible what I have been describing more briefly over the years to concerned members of Congress and in interviews and lectures, sometimes to captive audiences of fellow anti-nuclear resisters in jails.

Introduction: A Mass Murder Mystery (see sample chapter)

- A Joint Chiefs of Staff memo--Top Secret, Eyes Only for the President--reveals to me that the annual operational plan for general nuclear war proposes in a wide range of circumstances to kill 600 million people: Soviets, Chinese, satellite nations, West Europe and neutrals. (Later studies show this to be roughly half of the actual foreseeable deaths. Still later studies reveal their possibility of extinguishing most complex life on earth, via nuclear winter.)
- Humans—American humans—knowingly created this instrument of mass murder; some years later, the Soviets imitated it. The two Doomsday Machines still exist, on alert. The mystery: how did this come about? With what motives? What interests have maintained them? How close have they come to being triggered? Can they be dismantled?

1. The Bomb, My Father, and Me: “An Evil Thing in Any Light”

- In 1944 a class of 13-year-olds, of which I am a member, spends a week considering for a required essay what the implications would be for the world of a Uranium-235 bomb--1000 times more powerful than existing block-busters--coming into existence. We easily conclude that this would be bad news for humanity, no matter who had it first.
- Some nine months later, on August 6, 1945, I recognize the subject of our project in the headlines: the Bomb was here, and even though it was invented by Americans, it had been used already, on a city. I have a sense of dread not shared by most Americans, whose first thoughts of this weapon are that it is bringing victory and saving lives.
- Another mystery, mirroring and perhaps illuminating the larger one: how did this boy, already horrified by the terror bombing associated with the Nazis and alerted even prior to Hiroshima to the still-greater terrors of atomic weapons, grow up to become a nuclear war planner?
- Truth Dig, “America has been Asleep at the Wheel....” August 2010. Dad & Bombers. Dad & H-Bomb. Me & John Hersey.

2. The Making of a Cold Warrior

- My senior year in high-school and early years in college, the Cold War emerges, with an engulfing ideology: Stalin=Hitler. SU threatens to occupy Europe as Hitler did. The Truman Doctrine, Czechoslovakian coup, the Berlin Blockade .Soviet A-bomb, fall of China; Hiss and Rosenberg: all these undermine credibility of my brother's left-wing influence, (my union membership, Dodge plant, ...), my friends' skepticism of Chambers about Hiss; I'm ready to believe Truman.. Korea: US/UN response to aggression. After student deferments, I volunteer for officer training in the Marine Corps.) Increased credibility of, interest in, military. In 1956 I extend my two-year tour to accompany my battalion to the Mediterranean in expectation of the Suez Crisis).
- Unknown to me, there is a nuclear dimension to these events. Berlin: Truman's first public threats of nuclear first-use, sending B-29s to Britain. SU bomb: H-bomb decision. Korea: where Eisenhower secretly threatens nuclear first-use. During my first weeks at Quantico, Eisenhower offers nuclear weapons to the French to rescue Dienbienphu (de Weese: "your rifles better be clean." USMC offshore. Suez: which brings nuclear threats from Khrushchev.

3. Decision Making Under Uncertainty & A Theory of Threats: The political Uses of Madness

- Back at Harvard in the Society of Fellows, I continue my study of decision-making under uncertainty, the subject of my undergraduate honors thesis. Risk, Ambiguity & Decision. [earlier: I apply game theory to international relations, under Barrington Moore] Subjective probabilities. I extend this [without applying my notions of ambiguity, as would be appropriate] to an analysis of bargaining and threats. Influence of Tom Schelling bargaining theory. And see Tom Schelling's "The Threat that Leaves Something to Chance". ; Games of chicken, competitive risk taking. My conceptualization in terms of non-zero-sum game theory.
- . My Lowell Lectures on *The Art of Coercion* include "Theory and Practice of Blackmail" and "The Political Uses of Madness," the latter analyzing Hitler's successful threats in the Thirties and drawing an analogy to Khrushchev's current (1958) nuclear threats over Berlin. Discuss lectures and subjective probability, and intervals of probability (See JFK on C-II; McG B on Pleiku;
- By invitation, I repeat that lecture to Henry Kissinger's graduate seminar at Harvard.

- **5. Sputnik & the Spectre Haunting RAND: A Nuclear Surprise Attack/Pearl Harbor**

Summer of 1957: seminar on probability under Patrick Suppes at Stanford (SSRC grant); visit to RAND (first heard of RAND from my tutor at Harvard, Richard Goodwin), Vatican of decision theory and game theory; meet Charlie Hitch and Alain Enthoven (night swimming in the Pacific). Offer of summer consultantship. Just afterwards: Sputnik. (ICBM test). Missile Gap; (bomber gap; deterrent gap; Gaither Report and CD) R-290, R-266.

- As a summer consultant at the RAND Corporation in 1958, I join “the Wizards of Armageddon,” the major theorists of deterrence: Albert Wohlstetter, Herman Kahn, Andrew Marshall, Harry Rowen and others. From classified discussion and studies, I come quickly to share their obsession: deterring a near-term Soviet nuclear surprise attack. Influence of Roberta Wholstetter’s Pearl Harbor, *Signals & Decision*. Issues of ambiguity, noise, and Type I and Type II errors (Type II, not going when you’re supposed to go; hence, hair trigger).
- The problem my colleagues and I focus on day and night: how to maintain reliably the retaliatory capability to kill as many Russians as possible—more than the Soviets had suffered in World War II-- after a Soviet surprise attack with superior missile forces, a disarming first strike that would exploit vulnerabilities Wohlstetter and the other theorists had discerned in our retaliatory capabilities.
- A key premise of my RAND colleagues and of the JCS, which I did not question, was that the Soviets, like Hitler, were absolutely ruthless in their willingness to exterminate their chief rival, the US, in order to gain world domination, and that they were prepared to accept very high fatalities to do so. It was assumed that they were in a crash effort to develop an intercontinental striking capability to disarm US forces and destroy America’s ability to recover. K’s bluffs on strategic bomber production in 1954 led to a DOD belief in a bomber gap in the mid-1950s, and then, when this did not materialize, to the prediction of a missile gap, fueled by the Soviets first testing an ICBM in August of 1957, followed by Sputnik. RAND assumed the Soviets were in a crash program to produce and deploy an ICBM force capable of destroying all SAC bases and US command and control, although the analyses of Wholstetter and Rowen predicted that a disarming first strike was possible, even with a minimal force of ICBMs, 30 to 50, complementing their bomber capabilities. Thus they foresaw a possible Soviet first strike capability as early as 1960 or 61, or even conceivably, 1959.

- Because of their perception of Bolshevik aims and values, and their approaching capabilities for surprise attack, the analysts I was working with believed, with Wholstetter, that nothing other than a reliable retaliatory capability – assured of surviving the best possible Soviet surprise attack – with the ability to destroy more lives and military and industrial potential in the USSR than they had suffered in World War II – could dissuade or deter the Soviet leaders from launching such an attack. In other words, the avoidance of major nuclear war could be achieved only by producing near-certainty in the minds of Soviet leaders that the Soviet Union would suffer extremely high fatalities and destruction in any circumstances of nuclear war, even if they achieved total surprise and operated with maximum cleverness and efficiency.
- In effect, I join an apocalyptic cult, regarded skeptically by most of those without clearances, but buttressed by CIA estimates of an impending “missile gap” and by the sense of urgency and the charismatic brilliance of my mentors. Avert this by lowering vulnerability. (List the vulnerabilities discovered or hypothesized by RAND, which increased the feasibility and plausibility of a Soviet surprise attack, assuming the Soviets possessed the forces estimated by USAF or even by the CIA).
- Kahn’s Type II deterrence (I discover this to be the basis of our posture, the true aim). Uses of false alarms! (Dr. Strangelove)

My first classified memo: on unauthorized action (based, perhaps, on false alarm), overriding what controls exist. Suggestion for PALs; problems of envelope authentication; lack of Stop codes.

In fall of 1958 and spring of 1959, I argue with Junior Fellows (including Everett Mendelson, one of the founders of SANE with David Reisman) all year on the dangers of a Soviet surprise attack. (I earn a reputation as a fanatic on this subject, that term). I accept full-time employment at RAND for the summer of 1959: criticized by Seymour Melman: “You’re working for death, I’m working for life.” My advisor thinks I’m selling out; I say, I’d work for free, I’d pay for the chance.

My Lowell Lectures on the Art of Coercion. (Seminar with Henry Kissinger.) Peculiar qualities of nuclear threats: credibility demands madness, or loss of control. (See above). Hitler exemplifies the former. (See HAK to me in 1970). (What I discover at RAND and the Pacific shows that actual threats depend on the latter!)

Part II: Hidden Histories

6. Doomsday Machines [& the Ultimate Decision]

- At RAND as a full-time employee in the summer of 1959, I am led by my academic studies to focus on a preeminent problem of decision-making under uncertainty: a president's choice of executing the nuclear war plans, or not, in circumstances of ambiguous warning or ongoing conventional war. Vulnerability of command. Times, delays, mistakes in transmission.
- In a task force studying this “nuclear command and control” problem in the Pacific theater, I become familiar—probably more so than any other civilian at the time—with the structure of plans and alert procedures for general nuclear war, and with their contradictions and peculiarities. (see sample chapter) These include:
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Spasm War (wargasm):

- Lack of any plan at that time for fighting Russians anywhere without simultaneously obliterating China, along with the Soviet Bloc;
- Lack of provision for any reserve force or alternative targeting options: all-or-nothing plans against a fixed target list, what Herman Kahn termed “spasm war” (or “wargasm”);
- Fixed target list, including along with nuclear forces: antiaircraft sites (bomb as you go); conventional forces; command and control (including Moscow and all command shelters); in satellites as well; mostly ground bursts (fallout); “urban-industrial areas.” In SU and China.
- Under all circumstances of general war all planning called for the inexorable obliteration of every city in the Soviet Union and China
- “Collateral damage” to civilians from attacks on nearby military or industrial targets was regarded as “bonus,” to be maximized rather than avoided, in the Soviet Union and China; and casualties from fallout in the satellites, West Europe and neighboring neutral states (Afghanistan, Finland, Japan, India...) were accepted. (Power on Albania.; SAC estimates...)

- Plans were almost entirely premised on the desirability and expectation of a U.S. first strike, either preemptively on ambiguous warning or escalating from a limited, non-nuclear conflict: not, as in the public mind, retaliating to actual unambiguous arrival of attacking warheads;
- Obsession and planning effort to avoid “interference,” bombers’ fratricide, despite wholly illusory fixes, infeasibility (hence, single plan).
- Extreme redundancy in targeting; cross-targeting; Moscow. (“Overkill”)
- NESC 2009: optimum mix. (Still Top Secret; the basis for all subsequent war-planning).
- SIOP-62 (failed effort to reduce redundancy)

7. **“Toying with the Mousetrap”: JSCP and GEOP; for what contingencies were general war plans intended, by the president?**

- Structure of war plans; discrepancies (PACOM Response to a JCS Execute Message);
- PACOM Alternative Undertaking: mainly cities; (reflects the Navy’s advocacy of a minimum deterrent strategy).
- Ruth Davis advises me to see JSCP. Lukeman gives me a copy in the Pentagon (JCS directives: not to be given to SecDef or OSD: retype if necessary. JSOP, yes: but it doesn’t define general war.
- When to execute JSCP Annex C (the operational plan for general war): **definition of general war** (armed conflict with the USSR, involving more than two or three brigades, anywhere in the world). Background under Ike (see Maxwell Taylor). (No limited war with SU; escalation certain; avoid busting budget with unlimited requirements from Army).
- Ike attitude on tac nucs in Europe, European control of nucs, FS;
- How would general war arise? According to the JSCP: surprise attack least likely; more likely, escalation: Berlin; possible East German forces supporting an East German uprising, and under attack by Soviet forces “backing in to NATO territory,” pursued by Warsaw pact: implicit allusion to real contingency: West German intervention in an East German uprising (as in Berlin 1953; Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia). For this, SIOP?! This, in contrast to an aggressive offensive against West Europe by the Warsaw Pact, was an armed conflict that has some real likelihood of arising.

8. How Many Fingers on the Button?

Possibility of Unauthorized Action

- Lack of locks on nuclear weapons preventing deliberate unauthorized launch or detonation. (Such “permissive action links” first introduced under JFK for tactical and allied weapons were resisted for years by the Strategic Air Command and much longer on Navy submarines);
- Deliberate omission of any “Stop” code once bombers had been released to attack (as dramatized in the movie: *Dr. Strangelove*), making it impossible to halt an attack based on a false alarm or unauthorized action or in case of enemy surrender during the many hours of bomber flight;
- Universal disregard or bypassing of “two-man rules” meant to prevent one man from launching strikes without authenticated authorization; (later Bob Woodward confirms this to me from his own later experience as a nuclear control officer aboard ship; Bruce Blair confirms it for Minuteman missiles, from his own experience as a launch control officer; also, neutralizing PAL-type controls on Minuteman).
- Significant possibilities of accidents involving nuclear weapons (actual occurrences, 1958, 1961, 1968) and major false alarms (frequently experienced, in particular in 1979 and, in the SU, in 1983 and 1995) and of unauthorized launch.

In sum, I discover that *Dr. Strangelove* was a documentary.

The threats are mad (whether first- or second-strike). But under Ike or JFK or LBJ, their credibility cannot and does not rest primarily on the possibility of a mad president. Their credibility depends on the real possibility (as in the film) of loss of control by the president, possibly to mad subordinates (as in the film) or simply to subordinates who are mistaken about the imminence of Soviet attack and/or the advantages of US preemption (also in the film).

[What I don’t know for another twenty years—in common with everyone else—is that the system constitutes a literal Doomsday Machine with respect to life on earth: as in the film, or in the original conceptions of Szilard and Herman Kahn].

9. Delegation

The ability of subordinates to carry out these threats without presidential orders rests-- I discover to my surprise—not just on carelessness or unconcern but on presidential decisions in the advance of crises (as in the film).

- Secret delegation of presidential authority to initiate nuclear war in various circumstances to theater commanders (in contrast to publicly declared policy declared to this day, asserting falsely that this authority rests solely with the president under all circumstances);
- Sub-delegation of this authority to subordinate commanders, and simple assumption of authority at some low tactical levels. In short, many fingers on the button;
- Seventh Fleet; Kadena, Okinawa; Kunsan. (Relate to my 1958 memo: cascade of contingencies).)Relevance to Quemoy crisis, 1958.
- Recently declassified memos from Ike: he had authorized sub-delegation, after all.
- Thus, in reality, **an unknown but very large number of fingers on the button!**
- [LATER? Part of cover-up, Strangelove phenomenon:1964: LBJ and McNamara make it a campaign issue, in response to Goldwater; I warn Yarmolinsky; McGeorge Bundy has already warned LBJ. Flower-petal ad. Declaration by retired Chiefs, calling for full delegation. [? Compare to VN escalation hoax; even, JCS mention in 1964 that nuclear weapons might be needed.)
- ? [This could be in summing up infeasibility, hoax, of FS D-L]: Later **cover-up**, along with highest level of secrecy; Admiral Miller to Congress; my briefing to Zablocki; my briefing to Symington; inability of scholars to get an answer: Rosenbaum, others; after PP, my briefings to Cronkite, Woodward and Bernstein; Hersh interview, my press conference; meanwhile, charade of “briefcase.”

- All this when Soviets **should** be told, to deter decapitation. In other words, exactly as in *Dr. Strangelove*, an arrangement that makes sense only in order to deter an adversary and which therefore requires disclosure to this same adversary (in the film, the Doomsday Machine), is kept highly secret, apparently to avoid alarming the domestic public and the rest of the world. [Later, the Soviets don't tell us about delegation in Cuba; or Dead Hand]. So decapitation remains MAIN incentive for preemption on both sides, though it is an illusion (on both sides).
- [? Perhaps at end, or at least later]. When to put this in: after discussion of preemption, decapitation, LOW, damage-limiting: all subjects unknown to public. And see: atmospheric interference with FS over the Pole; EMP; SLBMs; fratricide; all making FS damage-limiting infeasible (along with C3 vulnerability) (and nuclear winter!)

10. A Hundred Holocausts: The Plan for General Nuclear War

- I spend the Christmas season, 1960, in a high-level task force for Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates helping design a command system to preserve presidential control under Soviet surprise attack. Nevertheless, despite my reports and recommendations on many of the above anomalies and dangers, my warnings and those of others bring about little change under Eisenhower. (Half a century later, most of my notes and files of this period are still guarded in RAND or Pentagon safes, or lost and buried under a dumpsite near Tarrytown, New York.)
- When the new Secretary of Defense under Kennedy, Robert McNamara, brings a crew from RAND, the so-called “whiz kids,” to work for him at the Pentagon—including my boss at RAND Charlie Hitch and my friends Harry Rowen and Alain Enthoven—I become a consultant to the Office of Secretary of Defense, spending up to half the year in Washington, 1961-64. I have the run of the documents on Rowen’s desk.
- After briefing the president’s assistant for national security, McGeorge Bundy, on most of the problems described above, he names me as a one-man investigation of the delegation of presidential nuclear authority (though ultimately, against my recommendation, Kennedy secretly continues the Eisenhower delegation and sub-delegation, “rather than reverse the decision of the Great General,” as Bundy’s deputy puts it). [Recently declassified: Bundy memos on this, after my briefing but before my study: not clear why my study. Note McGeorge Bundy proposing study by me, FRUS Oct. 15? 1962]

- Rowen assigns to me the preeminent opportunity to right what I see wrong in the Eisenhower-era plans and procedures by drafting the Basic National Security Policy (BNSP), President Kennedy's top secret guidance to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the annual operational plans for general nuclear war. [WWK was obvious candidate for this, after his study of counterforce targeting for the Air Force; but hsr really agrees with me, deemphasizing this (which was mainly aimed at giving the USAF a role to compete with Polaris) in favor of a coercive strategy and presidential control (rationalizing PALs), no cities.
- Earlier BNSP's under Eisenhower are brief, three or four pages; my thoroughgoing revision is almost twenty pages, reversing earlier policy in detail. Eventually my draft, unchanged, is issued by McNamara as SecDef Guidance to the JCS, accompanied by implementing instructions to the Strategic Air Command (also drafted in large part by me and Enthoven, with assistance from others). Changes include, among other things:
 - Alternative target systems, including presidential options to **withhold** attacks: a) on China (!); b) on Moscow (to permit war-ending. This was fiercely resisted by proponents of "decapitation"); c) on or near Soviet or Chinese cities; d) on military targets in satellite nations near cities.
 - Tighter presidential control, and survivable control by civilian authority: PALs. (See Marv Stern and PALs)
 - Elimination of "bonus" civilian damage; options minimizing civilian deaths and collateral damage from fallout. [did I mention restrictions on ground bursts? And multiple attacks increased fallout.]
 - Even "my" plan would have inflicted tens, scores of millions of fatalities, even if its minimal options had been directed and had been carried out perfectly.
- "My" revised guidance is the basis for the operational war plans under Kennedy—reviewed by me for Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric in 1962, 1963 and 1964—and has been reported by insiders and scholars to have become the basic framework for U.S. strategic war plans ever since. I help Enthoven draft first set of options. With help of Lukeman, draft McNamara memo to SAC to explore immediate changes.
- In contrast to guidance prior to 1961, my Top Secret guidance paper has never been completely declassified. However, my own copies of it, along with my memos to the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of Defense highlighting and explaining the changes from the Eisenhower plans, survive in my possession after loss of the buried files.
- Contrary to public agreements with Japan, nuclear weapons were routinely aboard U.S. Navy ships in Japanese harbors, and were permanently stationed in tidal waters of Japan off at Iwakuni Marine Air Base (I learn in Pacific in 1960); My

effort to alert superiors to the dangers of stationing nuclear weapons off Iwakuni in Japan (unreflected in the records of the Secretary of Defense's Assistant for Nuclear Affairs, and lied about by the Navy) leads to McNamara's ordering the situation changed. His directive is withdrawn after vehement protest from the Chief of Naval Operations (who asks, unsuccessfully, that I be fired from RAND).

- My urgent effort to have the President possess and read a copy of the JCS war plan (to scare him into directing radical changes) is a failure. McGeorge Bundy's request for a copy for the president is summarily rebuffed by the Joint Staff. The JCS default on a promise to accompany their oral briefing on the plan to Bundy, McNamara and Gilpatric at the Pentagon with a copy of the plan itself, though they purport to do so. When Gilpatric shows me the document they have given him, it is merely a copy of the top secret briefing, which omits crucial details of the actual plan (including the broad range of circumstances under which it is designed to be executed, exterminating the "Sino-Soviet Bloc" and much else).
- At Gilpatric's request, I draft a long set of top secret questions he sends to the JCS ostensibly relating to their briefing (actually, reflecting their real plan, which I retrieve from the Air Staff). These are designed to convey that someone working for the Office of Secretary of Defense has a detailed knowledge of "where the bodies are buried": the controversies and highly questionable compromises the JCS have so far concealed from the Office of Secretary of Defense. Thus dissimulation by them is risky, though honest answers are unthinkable.
- In the words of Bundy's deputy Robert Komer, on reading my list of queries in the White House: "If these were Japanese generals, they would have to commit suicide on reading these questions." American generals are less sensitive; after repeated requests for more time, the Deputy Secretary's questions ultimately go unanswered. But as he calculates, they end resistance to the new guidance.
- In a visit to SAC Headquarters in Omaha in August, I learn that SAC Commander Thomas Powers approves my guidance. I also learn, from the chief of SAC war plans, that Powers believes the Soviets at that time have "1000" operational ICBMs (the U.S. has 40); though, somewhat contradictorily, he has joined with the other Chiefs in assuring Kennedy that if the Berlin Crisis should force the president to order a U.S. first strike, the U.S. would suffer no more than 10 million deaths. (I raise question of this discrepancy).
- Kennedy finds this JCS estimate unreassuring: as he does a "well-designed" first-strike option with a comparable predicted result presented to him (without my knowledge) by some of my civilian colleagues: Kaysen, Kaufmann. Nevertheless, in a speech on Berlin, Kennedy announces an increase in the defense budget, mobilizes reserves, and calls on Americans to build fallout shelters. (Fallout shelter craze).

- I participate in a high-level Berlin Crisis Game involving high officials as players. I read Berlin planning, leading up to US FU. [In discussions with Acheson and Wohlstetter. Acheson's recommendations' "tell no one your decision."] In light of Khrushchev's belligerence and supposed ICBM superiority—he has just renewed atmospheric testing and exploded the largest warhead ever tested, equivalent to 58 million tons of high explosive—and overwhelming Soviet conventional forces in the vicinity of Berlin, the game leads some participants to conclude: "Berlin is hopeless; we have to withdraw."
- One of the questions from my list was separated out by Komer in the spring of 1961 and sent to the JCS in the name of President Kennedy: "If your plans for general war are carried out as planned, how many will die in the Soviet Union and China?" (I had been led to believe that they did not have an answer to this, up to date: although past BNSPs had made estimates of several hundred million, rising from tens of millions in the atomic era.) This one and a subsequent question asking for the worldwide death toll, surprisingly, does get a fast answer, mentioned in the Introduction above. 600 million dead.
- This is what we will do to a quarter of the earth's population if we carry out fully our Berlin plans in 1961 (or next year, in the Cuban Missile Crisis, if the Soviets retaliated to our invasion of Cuba against Turkey or Berlin, as JFK expected). Whatever civil defense might do for the US in a US first strike, it is irrelevant to Britain and Europe, or the Sino-Soviet Bloc (though all the latter seems to be ignored in US calculations of policy over Berlin).

And this was not for retaliation for a Soviet nuclear attack, but a US first strike, possibly arising over Berlin or an uprising in Eastern Europe.

11. "The Morality of Obliteration Bombing" [How had it come to this? "How long our misery has been in preparation"] [Benjamin?]

--early history of bombing of cities, pre-World War I and World War I (noncombatant immunity); Douhet-Mitchell terror bombing. Forecast of firebombing (Mitchell-Tokyo in 1920s! after earthquake; and Marshall-Japan, November 1941). F. Sallagar's RAND Report on The Road to Total War, detailing the escalation to strategic bombing in WW II (I read this at RAND in 1958);, Feb. 1942 RAF shift to terror bombing. CP Snow on firebombing ("Were we wolves in human form"?); Hamburg firestorm; Dresden-Tokyo firestorms; Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, efforts to create firestorms "a hole in one," describing British Bomber Command in World War II and "the moral slide."

Hansell on motives for turning to firebombing of Japan. Michael Sherry, *Postwar Plans for Peace*. Need for 60 group airforce; Russia only target big enough (till China comes along?).

McNamara, Norstad, Arnold, pressure on LeMay for Tokyo bombing (LeMay tactics; Power leads raid; LeMay characterization of results in McKinley Kantor memoir *Mission with LeMay*. Spaatz unease about the bomb; you might need only a few planes. No civilian or military adviser to Truman ever urges him not to use the bomb under any circumstances. It would have made no sense to object to the use of the Bomb on moral grounds while accepting the past and ongoing obliteration firebombing of almost all of Japan's major cities.

Early SAC warplans against Soviet cities. LeMay's requirement for nuclear weapon; one bomb for Russia. LeMay; "war is killing people; when you kill enough people, the other side quits." When I had seen the JSCP Annex C calling for the immediate destruction of all Soviet cities at the onset of the attack, I had assumed that this was implicitly a second strike, retaliatory strategy, aimed purely at punishment or revenge for deterrent purposes. Actually, it was LeMay's concept of a first strike strategy, since his experience had taught him that wars were won by the destruction of enemy cities.

I discover in the BNSP's of the 1950s that the prospective fatalities in the USSR suddenly climb from 10 to 15 million in the early 1950s to hundreds of millions from one year to the next as H-bombs come into operational status in about 1956 [Eisenhower; "we should get some social scientists in here to see how long humanity can withstand such weapons developments"; "keep them confused about difference between fission and fusion."]

From their very first conception right through to the present day, nuclear weapons have had primarily the function of holding enemy populations hostage or destroying them. See Szilard on chain reaction; then on operating pile (humanity was in for a lot of grief; a dark day"). Franck report on the implications of A-bomb for later H-bomb; Oppenheimer's concern about H-bomb; GAC opposes crash course on H-bomb ("An evil thing considered in any light"). But Oppenheimer and Conant persuaded not to resign or make public their opposition by Acheson! Bethe proposes no first use; Lilienthal group proposes no first test and candor about H-bomb effects; Ike initially endorses Operation Candor but switches to Operation Wheaties; Atoms for Peace speech at UN, which will spread reactors around the world producing plutonium.

US monopoly, at first.

NATO strategy calls for a US ability to disarm the SU (or else: simple madness)—as alternative to giving Germany an independent nuclear capability. (Like France and UK). Throughout the Fifties, this had some realism, for the US reflecting enormous superiority though it could not protect West Europe! Credibility depended either on the US and Europe not noticing that they were proposing to launch an attack suicidal for Europe

(implausible, but apparently feasible, on the basis of available evidence) or for the US not caring (lots of indication of this). Extended deterrence; Type II. Herman Kahn (make it rational for US, by CD and ABM and counterforce, perhaps coercive strategy (though I don't think he recommended this for the US; he predicted it for the SU!)

Counterforce strategy is synergistic with the desires of the MIC—specifically the aerospace industry, and SAC—for huge buildups of bombers, missiles, photo reconnaissance (see Leghorn and Itek) and electronics, and Air Force budgets and personnel. These are also served by over-estimation, and then, real stimulation, of comparable build-up by the Soviets.

12. Secret Collapse/Reversal of the Missile Gap:

In late September, 1961, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) reports the astonishing fact, reflecting comprehensive coverage of Soviet sites by the secret program of satellite reconnaissance, that the Soviets have less than ten ICBMs. I learn in the White House that the actual number, confirmed in the next NIE, is four. Not the one thousand estimated by SAC, not the 120 or 160 mentioned as likely in the most recent NIE of June: **four**. The U.S. had ten times as many.

- In addition, we had some 60 IRBMs in range of Russia in Italy, Britain and Turkey; about 120 Polaris submarine warheads at sea; and about **2000** long-range strategic bombers (the Soviets had 192), plus about a thousand tactical bombers in range of the Soviet Union. (check numbers)
- Since 1958, NIE's have not been made available to contractors like RAND, so that RAND studies since then have reflected exclusively the high missile gap estimate of 1958—as though fixed in amber—and the still-higher Air Force estimates since then. Having read the SNIE in the Pentagon and been told the precise figure and the basis for it, I convene a top secret briefing at RAND in Santa Monica to bring department heads and project leaders into the new world. For the first time in a briefing by me, I accompany my talk with charts: large, hand-lettered sheets of briefing paper on a standing easel, each page meticulously stamped top secret at top and bottom.
 - One: “Yes, Virginia, there is a missile gap.”
 - Two: “It is currently running 10 to 1.”
 - Three: “In our favor.”
- “How would they know?” is the first question. I can't tell them the answer to that, because I'm not supposed to know. The reconnaissance satellite program is classified higher than top secret; my being told about it is a very unusual violation of the regulations, since I don't yet have that clearance.[Hardly any RAND

employees had known of the U-2 program from 1956-60.] I hope to get it (as I do) and I don't repeat the violation by telling my colleagues that the evidence is from comprehensive coverage of the Soviet Union with high-resolution satellite photographs, a program whose existence is unknown to them despite their top secret clearances.

- **No one** in that audience believes the news I bring from Washington. I am, after all, saying that all their urgent efforts of the past seven years or so have been misdirected toward illusionary problems, based on wildly false premises about Soviet motives and capabilities. They have been working furiously in a dreamworld: a nightmare, but one from which they resist awakening. The amber preserving their distorted image of reality holds firm, for months to years in Santa Monica.

13. My “Unconscious” Nuclear Threats

- After my briefing at RAND on the new SNIE, I propose to Carl Kaysen a “dialog” between JFK and Khrushchev, exposing the myth of the missile gap. Kaysen rejects this: “You have to take account of the properties of the communication channel; JFK would never take this tone.”
- I draft a speech for JFK, sent over with approval by McNamara; instead JFK gives a much more conciliatory speech. (I say to Yarmolinsky: “He didn’t have to give a speech *about* me” (JFK referred to “extremists of the right and of the left”). I then offer my draft to Timothy Stanley, who is drafting a speech for Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric. Stanley uses my key assertions (all those quoted by the NYT): publicly exposing the myth of the missile gap and proclaiming U.S. nuclear superiority: thus ending the Berlin Crisis of 1961 but contributing to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.
- [Much later, I realize that – although I would have said that I had never consciously endorsed the notion of first use of nuclear weapons or even of threatening first use – my input to the Gilpatric speech, did amount to a first use threat. At the time, I thought of it simply as assuring the Soviets that we would maintain our access to Berlin with conventional ground troops; but we could have taken such measures only in the assurance that they, the Soviets, would not overwhelm our troops with their superior ground forces in the vicinity of Berlin. And this assurance would have to be based on our credible first use threat, reflecting our overwhelming first strike capability].
- [Moreover, my work editing the final draft of McNamara’s Ann Arbor commencement speech in June, 1962—basing it largely on Bill Kaufmann’s draft of McNamara’s classified Athens speech to NATO in May, 1962—made me complicit in what was interpreted, reasonably, as a formulation of a US first-strike policy (reflecting my own SecDef guidance of the previous year, though I had consciously understood that as a retaliatory, second-strike policy).]

14. Secrecy, the Cuban Missile Crisis, & the Risks of Nuclear War

After spending the first half of 1962 writing my Ph.D. thesis for Harvard, "Risk, Ambiguity and Decision," I am called to the Pentagon by Harry Rowen for consultation on the night President Kennedy announces the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and his initial response of a blockade. Sleeping, when possible, on a couch in the Pentagon over the next five days, I participate in two of the three working groups reporting to the Executive Committee of the NSC (EXCOMM). That experience and my interagency study of nuclear crises (below) leads to major findings not yet revealed—until this memoir--on the origins and ending of the crisis.

It also leads to my spending 1964 in an interagency study—with clearances higher than top secret—of nuclear crises, the Cuban Missile Crisis in particular but also a number of others. I consult with Mort Halperin on his 1964 study of the 1958 Quemoy crisis: seen by its participants as "the first serious nuclear crisis." Significant portions of this, not yet declassified, will be presented here for the first time.

In mid-1964, I accept the invitation of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (John T. McNaughton) to be his Special Assistant (as a GS-18, highest "super-grade" in the civil service) on the basis of his inducement that I would witness and participate from the inside—to the benefit of my study of crises-- in "an ongoing crisis: Vietnam." (See "Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers.")

15. "As Explosive as a Nuclear Bomb": The US "Anti-Proliferation" Fraud [this chapter may be excluded]

After India secretly requests help with a nuclear weapons test following the Chinese explosion in 1964 (known to me as a Pentagon official at the time, never before revealed), internal discussions disclose high-level skepticism, by Secretary of Rusk in particular but also by McNamara, about the very *desirability* of opposing nuclear proliferation by "our friends," like India, or even Japan or Germany. Rusk says that Gilpatric report, criticizing this stance and supporting efforts to curb nuclear proliferation "was as explosive as a nuclear bomb." McGeorge Bundy goes onto say that this internal deviation from our declared opposition to proliferation must not be allowed to leak, and the very existence of the report must be kept secret (Seaborg, 1987: 145, 136).

The ensuing high-level Gilpatric Committee rejects the Rusk position and secretly proposes an anti-proliferation program calling for major changes in U.S. nuclear posture and first-use policy. Declassified only a few years ago, it remains the best blueprint to

this day for an effective campaign against proliferation led by the U.S. But LBJ secretly rejects the program, and it remains largely unfulfilled after forty-five years during which American "non-proliferation" efforts have been essentially a hoax. (Like "arms control" negotiations essentially premised on maintaining American superiority.) See "willful blindness" toward Japanese virtual nuclear capability, Israeli bomb, Pakistan and India, and support to nuclear efforts by Iran (under the Shah) and Iraq.) (And decision by JFK in 1963 to support French testing: revealed here for the first time).

16. "Those Were Very Good Lectures": Nixon's Nuclear Madman Threats

In 1969, ten years after my 1959 lecture to Henry Kissinger's seminar on Hitler's "mad" threats to Czechoslovakia, President Nixon—unknown to me-- is secretly enacting what he privately calls his "madman theory" by making nuclear threats against North Vietnam. In mid-1970, Kissinger recalls my lecture in my presence at San Clemente. "I have learned more from Dan Ellsberg," he tells my companion Lloyd Shearer, "than from anyone else on the subject of bargaining." At first, I have no idea what he is talking about; then, remembering my lectures to his seminar, I say: "You have a very good memory." Kissinger says: "They were very good lectures." Flattering, but a hair-raising allusion, in the midst of the Vietnam War, by the president's assistant for national security to a Hitlerian strategy.

President Nixon enacts his "madman policy" in nuclear threats against North Vietnam 1969-73. His fears of my knowledge of these and other plans for escalation—plausibly known to me from my White House contacts from my work for him in late 1968 and early 1969 drafting an "Options" paper on Vietnam and questions he put to the national security bureaucracy—lead to his criminal efforts in 1971-72 to stop me from exposing his secret policy. Exposure of these criminal actions against me by his White House "plumbers" is critical to his resignation facing impeachment, making possible the ending of the war nine months later.

18. Nuclear Crisis Studies

My surprising discovery in 1974 (from Roger Morris, and subsequent research by Sy Hersh, Larry Berman and others) of the serious role of nuclear threats in Nixon's Vietnam policy raises the question in my mind: "What *other* cases of nuclear threats have I (with all my background in nuclear war planning, and my 1964 high-level study) managed not to know about?"

By combing memoirs and progressively declassified documents over the nearly forty years since, I uncover a pattern—first published in 1981—of recurrent U.S. **use** of nuclear weapons--as a pistol is used by pointing it, whether or not the trigger is pulled--by Presidents Truman (Iran 1946, Berlin 1948 and Korea 1950); Eisenhower (Korea 1953; Indochina 1954, Quemoy, 1954 and 1958; Lebanon/Iraq/Kuwait 1958; deterring North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam, 1956-60; Berlin 1958-60); JFK (Berlin

1961, Cuba 1962); LBJ (Vietnam); Nixon (Vietnam, Syria, Egypt). Later, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama. Every president since Truman.

From this research I understand the US first-strike damage-limiting posture—which persists to the present—in an entirely new light: as backing up our first-use nuclear threats in the world, in NATO and periphery. The strategic function of the US effort to maintain a counterforce, damage-limiting first-strike capability, I conclude, is to support the credibility of US threats to escalate a nuclear conflict, perhaps to a disarming first strike against the Soviet Union, if Soviets were to respond with nuclear weapons (“second-use”) to a US nuclear first-use against a Soviet ally (Korea, North Vietnam, China) or against Soviet forces blockading Berlin or intervening in Iran (or, e.g., Turkey in the Cuban Missile Crisis.)

In other words, the US strategic first-strike capability is intended to support the credibility of US tactical first-use threats, by serving to deter Soviet second-use of its nuclear weapons. The first-use threats, in turn, have served to maintain US hegemony in regions right up to the borders of what we earlier regarded as the “Sino-Soviet Bloc,” or even inside those borders in the case of West Berlin.

Complicated? Not more than the usual calculations of an empire with global interests and “responsibilities”: for policy-makers, it’s checkers, not three-dimensional chess.

Effective? That’s controversial. But a case can be made for certain strategic benefits, not likely in the absence of this combination of first-use and first-strike nuclear threats.

- US presence in West Berlin,
- division of Germany, rearmament of West Germany within a US-led military alliance
- US leadership of the NATO alliance, major role in Europe;
- division of Indochina: US dominance in South Vietnam until 1975
- limitation of Soviet influence in the Middle East, in particular Iran.

Worthwhile? These benefits must be laid against the creation of two Doomsday Machines, which continue to threaten the continued existence of the human species and many others, and recurrent nuclear crises that have risked triggering these Machines.

There was also a budgetary cost of several trillion dollars expended on the US Machine (including the tactical nuclear weapons for the first-use threats, and the associated military forces associated with them. These costs are financed by taxes and (in recent decades, primarily) by borrowing: but they are associated with very rewarding benefits to the U.S. military-industrial complex (profits, R&D, and Service roles and budgets) and to U.S. politicians (jobs, votes, campaign contributions). These material incentives have probably been critical to maintaining the pursuit of a US counterforce, first-strike capability (including land-based missiles and bombers along with hundreds of highly accurate sub-launched missiles) for half a century after effective damage-limiting became realistically infeasible in about 1964, and even after the end of the Cold War twenty years ago.